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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Review of the implementation of the Convention, including support to regional action programmes

Note by the secretariat

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* ICCD/COP(4)/1.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its third session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) reviewed ICCD/COP(3)/5, on activities relating to the implementation of the Convention that the secretariat had supported or in which the secretariat had participated during the period from September 1998 to September 1999. Similar information on measures undertaken or planned by the secretariat for the period from September 1999 to September 2000, and preliminary information to the end of 2000 is contained in ICCD/COP(4)/3.

2. This note contains only a partial account of the implementation process. It is meant to complete the assessment made by the Parties and by concerned international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It focuses on specific activities to which the secretariat made a contribution through financial and/or technical support and through participation.

3. It is not intended to render a comprehensive account of the status of implementation of the Convention or of overall trends in implementation. Thus, no attempt is made to provide an account of the conclusions of the review process as requested by decision 11/COP.1, paragraph 19. As the process of national reporting was ongoing at the time this document was being prepared, the submission of such concluding remarks would have been premature. Furthermore, the ad hoc Working Group on the Review of Implementation, which will meet during the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 4), as requested by decision 6/COP.3, paragraph 3, is expected to provide guidance on the methodology to be followed for the comprehensive review process.

4. The secretariat has made every effort to facilitate the progress of affected country Parties in this crucial initial period of the implementation phase of the Convention. Catalytic support was provided to selected countries for the preparation of national action programmes (NAPs). In this respect, affected Parties are now more aware of the need to integrate such programmes into the broader strategic frameworks for sustainable development. Approximately 34 countries have developed national action programmes and are on the threshold of the actual implementation phase.

5. The secretariat aimed at facilitating the convocation of consultative processes leading to partnership agreements in the light of the pertinent articles of the regional implementation annexes and decision 5/COP.3, paragraph 29. For this purpose a meeting was organized in Cotonou, Benin, in February 2000. It illustrated the need for affected country Parties to further mainstream the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) process in the ministries concerned while, similarly, the need was recognized for developed country Parties to mainstream the UNCCD process through their administrative structures and mechanisms in charge of delivering development cooperation. More generally, and reflecting the outcome of COP 3, it was deemed necessary to identify a predictable mechanism for the consultative process meant to secure the expected level of partnership and international solidarity, including longer term financial support. Other meetings, such as the planned Round Table in China, specifically deal with this core issue and should help to steer the process.

6. Beyond activities at the national level, the second focus for support to affected country Parties remains regional cooperation. The secretariat continued to facilitate intergovernmental programmes at subregional, regional and interregional levels. Subregional programmes aim at identifying common interests and maximizing cooperation between neighbouring countries. Regional programmes will strengthen regional potential for information collection, capacity-building, research and development and technology exchanges, notably through the channels provided by the thematic programme networks. Interregional programmes seek to promote South-South cooperation.

7. The third major focus of the secretariat's work in the period under review was the compilation and synthesization of reports submitted by affected and developed country Parties. The reporting exercise, which started with the national reports submitted by African countries at COP 3, is continued with reports submitted to COP 4 by the affected country Parties of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Mediterranean and other countries. Reports continue to be more factual and descriptive than analytical. This collected information will assist Parties in guiding a review and a comparative assessment of progress made with respect to combating desertification based on information on a global scale.

8. The ratification and/or accession to the Convention by countries that had not until then joined was also assisted in order to make the Convention truly global. The secretariat organized the due consultative process for facilitating consideration of a new regional implementation annex for Central and Eastern Europe. In that context countries expressed the view that an existing range of measures to combat land degradation under various climatic systems could be enhanced under the Convention process.

9. Grass-roots involvement in the implementation process is being supported and an enabling environment conducive to increasing the participation of and partnership with civil society groups, particularly women, youth and pastoralists, has been strengthened. In the light of decision 18/COP.3, the secretariat has endeavoured to facilitate and encourage greater involvement of civil society at all levels of the implementation process, particularly NGOs. However, the limited financial resources available to assist NGOs to make their contribution remains a major limiting factor to their full participation. Past experience shows that with a minimum of support to the NGO community it is possible to accomplish numerous relevant activities and provide momentum to the implementation process.

10. In summary, four years after the entry into force of the Convention, substantive progress has been accomplished by the Parties in identifying the frameworks for programme development at all levels. While this first phase is still to be completed, there is a broad consensus that a new phase of the process is now starting in which partnership arrangements are expected to contribute to the sustainability of those first initiatives. In this context, as a facilitator of the Convention, the secretariat is striving to maintain the momentum of the process and has associated the Global Mechanism and interested partners with ongoing initiatives.

II. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA

National level

11. At the national level, countries have made substantial progress. Emphasis has been placed on the preparation and implementation of national action programmes. Activities to realize national action programmes are at various levels of implementation, reflecting the diverse socio-economic and environmental situations prevailing in African countries. Most of these countries have organized national awareness-raising seminars, and some 20 African countries have used national forums to officially launch the elaboration of their national action programmes. In addition, some countries decided to achieve consensus and validation on the finalized national action programme by holding a second national forum.

12. With respect to the mechanisms intended to reinforce and support the elaboration and subsequent implementation of national action programmes, all African countries have set up institutional coordinating bodies with national steering committees, focal point secretariats and technical subcommittees. All institutional bodies enjoy multidisciplinary and multisectoral representation, comprising such institutions as government departments, institutions of higher

learning and research, NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), the private sector and representatives of the donor community.

13. To date, 15 African countries have finalized and validated their national action programmes: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, Senegal, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Nearly all of them adopted the national action programme officially through their respective governments, or are scheduled to do so by the end of the year 2000. Furthermore, 10 countries are planning to finalize the elaboration of their national action programme before the end of the year 2000.

14. In the light of the above, it is clear that the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification has entered a new phase in Africa which, due to the inherent logic of the process, is focusing more strongly on the consultative mechanisms that should lead to the required partnership agreements called for by the pertinent provisions of the Convention.

15. So far, only a few countries have organized forums that focused on desertification activities, presenting priority programmes of their national action programme to development partners. Thus far, Mali organized a round table in 1998 and more countries are now expected to follow. At times, when round-table discussions did not take place, well established partnership processes with bilateral and international development partners provided an opportunity for affected countries to introduce and integrate UNCCD national action programmes as a standing item of ongoing consultations and negotiations.

16. Pursuant to decision 5/COP.3, paragraph 29, the secretariat, together with the Global Mechanism, facilitated a meeting that aimed at identifying ways and means of enhancing the implementation of the Convention by integrating national action programmes into sustainable development strategies or, alternatively, of launching consultative processes in affected countries. The meeting was held in Cotonou, Benin, in February 2000. A dozen African national focal points of countries that are the most advanced in the process of implementing their national action programmes, representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, and representatives of the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism engaged in a constructive discussion to identify bottlenecks and the necessary steps to overcome them. As a follow-up to this meeting, and according to the recommendations formulated by the participants, the secretariat is facilitating the convocation of the interested parties in countries upon request.

17. A number of countries received assistance for organizing national awareness-raising seminars and national forums, and for strengthening the capacities of the national coordinating bodies in such countries as Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Madagascar, Niger, Republic of Congo and Uganda.

Subregional level

18. At the subregional level, consultations were held to support the elaboration and, subsequently, the implementation of subregional action programmes within the African region.

19. In western Africa, a strategy to launch the implementation phase of a subregional action programme was elaborated. In October 1999, the focal points for the subregional action programme (Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) organized a meeting of leading institutions in Banjul, Gambia, that aimed at coordinating the eight priority fields of intervention. The objective of the meeting was to define modalities of the operational framework of the subregional action programme and its various thematic groups. Following this meeting, two of the thematic groups met to elaborate a work programme. In

addition, CILSS is planning to hold a workshop on exploring the relationships between the Rio conventions before COP 4, with the support of the European Community and the technical backstopping of the secretariat.

20. In northern Africa, the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Maghreb was adopted during a forum organized by the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) held in Algiers, in September 1999. With the assistance of the secretariat, a set of priority projects was established that aim, *inter alia*, to create a subregional information system, harmonize databases and strengthen human capacity development at the grass-roots level. These goals will be promoted in close collaboration with the Northern Mediterranean Parties.

21. Transboundary cooperation is another option for implementing the Convention at the subregional level. To date, eight transboundary pilot projects have been formulated with the support of the secretariat and other interested partners of which three are currently under implementation. The specific objective of these projects is to enhance the management of shared natural resources in a more effective manner, and to create conditions conducive to local integrated management. The approach is to strengthen cooperation through community-based pilot projects located in border areas. This approach is being followed by several Maghreb and Sahel countries, such as Algeria/Mali, Algeria/Tunisia, Burkina Faso/Mali, Burkina Faso/Niger, Mali/Mauritania, Mali/Niger and Mauritania/Senegal. The formulation of additional projects is planned, including in the Kalahari/Namib region.

22. In southern Africa, where cooperation at the subregional level is coordinated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), concrete projects on early warning systems are being formulated that relate to food security and environment monitoring. Emphasis has been placed on capacity-building, institutional strengthening and networking as the main priority areas of activity within the framework of the subregional action programme.

23. In eastern Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has finalized the first draft of a strategy framework to be reviewed and endorsed by IGAD policy organs and all other key players in a meeting planned for September 2000 in Nairobi, Kenya. The UNCCD secretariat is providing assistance to strengthen institutional capacity of IGAD in this intensive phase of implementation of the UNCCD.

24. In October 2000, the secretariat and the Global Mechanism are jointly organizing a subregional workshop for SADC and IGAD member countries. The objective of the meeting will be to discuss, *inter alia*, resource mobilization and partnership building for the implementation of the Convention. Similar workshops inviting national focal points of other African subregions are planned.

25. In central Africa, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), acting on behalf of 10 countries (Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe), organized, with assistance from the secretariat, a workshop in June 2000, in N'Djamena, with the objective of energizing the implementation of the UNCCD in this subregion.

Regional level

26. The secretariat organized jointly with UNEP the Third Regional Africa Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, in September and October 1999. The technical meeting and the ministerial session of that Conference reviewed the implementation process of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels and considered in detail the national reports to be submitted by affected African country Parties to the Conference of the Parties at its third session. The Fourth Regional Conference of African focal points is scheduled to be held

at Algiers, Algeria, in October 2000. In accordance with the recommendations of the seven regional thematic workshops held in 1998 and 1999, and following the agreed upon criteria for selecting focal points, six thematic focal points were appointed by the participants at the Third Regional Africa Conference mentioned above. Six thematic programme networks (TPN), each of which is to concentrate on a theme of major concern in Africa, will be established within the regional action programme. The themes are as follows:

(a) Integrated management of international river, lake and hydrogeological basins;

(b) Agroforestry and soil conservation;

(c) Rational use of rangelands and development of fodder crops;

(d) Ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems;

(e) Promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies;

(f) Sustainable agricultural farming systems.

27. The first consultative meetings were held in Bonn, Germany, in March and April 2000, and they defined the operational framework of the first three networks mentioned above. The meetings also helped to formulate standards, goals and activities of the different networks, thereby contributing to a comprehensive work plan that was established for the biennium 2000-2001.

28. The Regional Coordination Unit for Africa, hosted by the African Development Bank (AfDB), Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, has been fully operational since January 2000. A memorandum of understanding was signed in July 2000 by the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and the secretariat. The unit undertook the following activities during the period under review:

(a) Elaboration of a work programme for the biennium 2000-2001;

(b) Support to three thematic institutional focal points in order to prepare the launching of the three thematic programme networks in Africa (a, b and c);

(c) Technical assistance to the Third Regional Africa Conference;

(d) Facilitation of inter-agency coordination in Africa and mainstreaming of issues related to the Convention;

(e) Development of a project of electronic connectivity of all regional institutional focal points;

(f) Facilitation of communication between the secretariat and the countries in the region;

(g) Representation of UNCCD in subregional and regional meetings such as those organized by CILSS, ECOWAS, CEMAC, the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) and the African Development Bank;

(h) Elaboration of joint work plans with various specialized institutions such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Observatory of the Sahara and the Sahel (OSS).

III. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN ASIA

National level

29. At the national level, owing to the fact that Asian country Parties have been requested to present their national reports to the Conference of the Parties at its fourth session, the secretariat concentrated much of its effort in assisting countries in meeting their obligations. Thirty reports were submitted by countries, 25 of which received financial assistance for the reporting exercise. Apart from securing funds from various sources, the secretariat was grateful to the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), and to the Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), which extended technical know-how to such countries as Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen in the preparation of their national reports. The technical assistance focused mainly on advice on the organization, structure and content of the reports, taking into consideration both the stipulations of the Help Guide, as contained in ICCD/COP(3)/INF.3, and the characteristics of the countries concerned.

30. Furthermore, in an effort to assist countries in the preparation of their reports, three meetings of national focal points in Central Asia, Western Asia and other parts of Asia were arranged to review the key issues involved.

31. To date five Asian countries have adopted their National Action Programmes, namely China, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. All other Asian countries are currently engaged in the process of preparing them. Turkmenistan continued implementation of the national action programme. Uzbekistan, which completed the preparatory phase of its national action programme, obtained the approval of its Government at the end of 1999. Likewise, the national forum in Tajikistan, which took place in July, secured the Government's consent. It is expected that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will complete the preparation of their national action programmes by the end of 2000.

32. Since the end of 1999, assistance has been provided to Central Asian countries aimed at strengthening the role of national focal points. In accordance with the provisions of the Convention, the focal points are being encouraged to improve the coordination of national activities, to include participatory initiatives of the civil society into the overall framework, and to enhance the understanding among stakeholders of the value and nature of land and water resources in affected areas. Possibilities of transboundary cooperation are currently being examined. Institutional support is being provided to national non-governmental organizations through the national focal points. Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Sri Lanka have also been supported with the organization of national awareness-raising seminars.

33. With respect to the facilitation of partnership arrangements, a round-table meeting is scheduled to take place in Beijing, in early November 2000. It will aim at initiating a dialogue with donor governments and international organizations to support China's national action programme. The meeting is being organized jointly by the secretariat and the Chinese counterpart organization, namely, the China National Committee to Implement the CCD, with assistance from UNDP and the Global Mechanism.

34. The secretariat also initiated cooperation with the Asian Development Bank with a view to facilitating the Bank's support to the preparation and implementation of the NAPs.

Subregional level

35. At the subregional level, as already mentioned in the section on national reporting, subregional meetings were convened to support the preparation of national reports. Subregional organizations were also involved in the process.

36. At the request of five Central Asian States in the first half of 2000, the secretariat has initiated activities aimed at preparing a subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin. A preparatory meeting to establish a framework of potential cooperation between countries bordering the Aral Sea was held in July in Kyrgyzstan with the support of Germany and the World Bank.

37. The secretariat associated the Global Mechanism with the development of the Western Asian subregional action programme and also participated in meetings organized by the Global Mechanism in relation to the subregional action programme. As a follow-up to a subregional action programme review meeting at Cairo, in October 1999, the subregional action programme framework was officially adopted and endorsed by a meeting organized by the Global Mechanism in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in February 2000.

Regional level

38. At the regional level, the third meeting of the national focal points is scheduled to be held at Bangkok, Thailand, in September 2000. The meeting will assess progress made since the last COP by countries of the region in implementing the Convention and its regional action programme. It will also serve as a preparatory regional forum for COP 4.

39. In the context of the regional action programme, the Thematic Programme Network 2 (TPN2) on Agroforestry and Soil Conservation was successfully launched in March 2000, at New Delhi, India. The network aims at supplementing the ongoing national efforts in the region to develop sustainable agriculture in arid and semi-arid zones without jeopardizing fragile ecosystems. The network will facilitate information and technical know-how exchanges as well as regional cooperation.

40. The TPN3 on Rangeland Management and Sand Dune Fixation is scheduled to be launched by the end of 2000. The network will be hosted by the Rangeland and Forest Organization of Iran (Islamic Republic of). So far, seven countries in the region have already officially expressed their interest in the network. Its objective is to improve the productivity of rangelands in arid and semi-arid regions.

41. After having officially launched TPN1 in 1999, the secretariat is currently assisting the implementation of its programme of work. An expert consultation meeting took place in Tokyo, in June 2000. As a result, decisions were made on specific programmes and arrangements were made to distribute the workload between participating countries on a continuous basis that would lead to the production of a regional desertification map.

42. In order to conform to the schedule of regional cooperation agreed upon by the Asian Parties, the secretariat is also reviewing the preparatory steps of the three remaining TPNs whose themes cover water resources management, strengthening capacities for drought impact management and desertification control, and integrated local area development. Some countries have already expressed interest in hosting these TPNs during COP 3. Substantive preparation of the TPNs is pending the availability of financial resources.

43. The regional coordination unit of Asia was set up at the headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) of the United Nations and started its operation on 1 September 1999. A provisional agreement was reached between the UNCCD secretariat and ESCAP on the secondment of the regional coordinator. Furthermore, in 1999, UNEP contributed to its running costs. The secretariat is currently trying to secure further arrangements with potential organizations and Governments pending COP 4 decisions on the matter.

44. The Regional Coordination Unit was entrusted with the following tasks:

(a) To facilitate liaison between the secretariat and the countries within the region;

(b) To facilitate substantive inter-agency coordination and mainstream issues related to the Convention;

(c) To support the national reporting process in such countries as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao Peoples's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Vietnam;

(d) To provide substantive support in the preparation of partnership forums in the region;

(e) To provide support in the preparation of subregional initiatives in the region;

(f) To extend technical assistance in the review process of the implementation plan of the TPN;

(g) To provide technical support for the launching meeting of TPN3;

(h) To initiate preparatory work for an information system including the publishing of a UNCCD Asia newsletter;

(i) To promote synergy between the four conventions (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UNCCD and Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR));

(j) To represent UNCCD in regional forums such as those organized by ESCAP, the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (UNEP/ROAP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations/Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO/RAP), and the Asian Development Bank.

IV. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

National level

45. At the national level, because the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region have been requested to present their national reports to the Conference of the Parties at its fourth session, the secretariat concentrated much of its efforts on assisting those countries to meet their obligations. Thirty reports are expected to be presented, and the secretariat has extended assistance when requested and where possible.

46. Financial assistance was provided to 27 countries to help meet the cost of preparing and producing the reports, including national stakeholder meetings for the validation of the reports. Apart from this, the secretariat provided technical assistance by hiring five regional consultants to assist countries in that process. Those consultants were responsible for giving technical advice on the organization, structure and content of the reports, taking into consideration the stipulations of the Help Guide and the peculiarities of the country concerned.

47. In an effort to further assist the countries in the preparation of their national reports, a two-day consultation for consultants and coordinators was organized in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for Latin American and the Caribbean (UNEP/ROLAC). At that meeting the participants, *inter alia*, studied the Methodological Guide

and its application and submitted preliminary reports on the progress of the preparation of national reports in their countries. A great deal of attention was paid to the experience of the African countries gained in the preparation of their national reports presented to COP 3.

48. The preparation of these reports was specifically discussed in meetings attended by representatives of 26 countries. In addition to these meetings, related workshops and seminars were organized for discussion and subsequent adoption of the reports.

49. Assistance was granted to the Governments of Colombia and Venezuela for preparing national awareness seminars. Furthermore, the secretariat played an important role in the organization and hosting of the national awareness seminar of Jamaica. Apart from providing financial assistance for the event, the secretariat provided technical expertise in the form of preparing three background papers and informational material for the seminar. As a result, work has began on the development of the national action programme for Jamaica.

50. In accordance with the regional position that the Republic of Haiti should be given priority, some financial support was provided to the national coordinating unit responsible for helping to prepare the national action programme of Haiti. Both the secretariat and the Global Mechanism are working together in trying to assist Haiti in implementing the Convention.

51. To date, eight countries of the region have adopted their National Action Programmes, namely Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. The secretariat has continued to encourage and assist, where possible, the preparation of these programmes in a number of countries including Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica and Jamaica. The secretariat has responded to requests for assistance with the provision of expertise and information.

52. The secretariat is presently involved in discussions with the competent authorities in Bolivia and Cuba for the organization of the first partnership meeting between those countries and relevant donor countries and/or agencies. Those meetings will help to foster North-South cooperation and they constitute an integral part of the process of implementing the Convention as stipulated by the Conference of the Parties. In this context, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH/German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), as well as the Government of Spain, were helpful in securing assistance for the implementation process in Latin America and the Caribbean. The lack of adequate finances has been the major hindrance to the implementation process in the region. The secretariat has been consulting with potential partners, including foundations; unfortunately no positive results have been achieved so far.

Subregional level

53. At the subregional level, two projects, one for the Eastern Caribbean and the other for Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti), were submitted to the Global Environment Facility (GEF). To date, they are still under consideration by GEF. With regard to the implementation of the regional project on the harmonization of public policy, the Global Mechanism has given a commitment to assist the project. However, since this project depends on multilateral financing and other agencies have not taken a decision on the issue, it could not move from the finalized project design phase to implementation.

54. The regional coordination unit for Latin America and the Caribbean region is hosted by the UNEP Regional Office in Mexico. The Unit undertook the following tasks during the period under review:

(a) To install and operate a matrix node with complete Internet access, including a home page, electronic conferences, electronic libraries, e-mail and access to other information networks;

(b) To develop an operational plan for the network;

(c) To publish a regional information bulletin of the regional coordination unit (N°. 1);

(d) To develop a programme of work; and to provide technical support for the hosting of the second national meeting of the Mexican Network of Efforts against Desertification and Degradation of Natural Resources (RIOD-MEX) held at Mexico City, 9 and 10 December 1999;

(e) To provide technical assistance to the Governments of Brazil, Chile and Mexico in the development of a standard methodology for quantifying key indicators of plant and animal bio-diversity and to include them in a spatially distributed database of other physical, biological and socio-economic data related to the degradation of land in arid and semi-arid zones in collaboration with the Natural Heritage Institute;

(f) To prepare and negotiate the GEF project proposal Block "B" to develop an indicators model for dryland ecosystems in selected countries of Latin America;

(g) To provide technical assistance to Governments of Central America under a project proposal related to the management and sustainable development of priority watersheds in the region including prevention of land degradation;

(h) To provide technical assistance for the implementation of a programme for sustainable development of the Gran Chaco Americano;

(i) To provide technical and logistic assistance to the Fifth Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Lima, from 9 to 12 August 1999.

55. The secretariat continued the publication of the news bulletin online, which is sent out through the Information Network on Desertification and Drought (DESELAC). Due to the shortage of resources, it was not possible to publish the news bulletin as frequently as planned.

56. The secretariat has continued its efforts to develop and expand DESELAC, which now covers such countries as Dominica and St Lucia, previously not participants of the network.

57. The Sixth Regional Meeting will be held in October 2000 in San Salvador, El Salvador. Special attention will be paid to the presentation of national reports to the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties. The meeting will review, *inter alia*, the regional project on the Harmonization of Public Policies.

58. The development of the Grand Chaco subregional action programme was also supported. Steps are currently being taken to secure further funding for it. The objective of the project is to develop a sustainable development programme for the region that involves Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. During the period under review the secretariat sought closer cooperation with such organizations as the Global Mechanism, UNDP and UNEP. Efforts to increase cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank in the interest of greater support for implementation are ongoing.

V. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AND OTHER EUROPEAN REGIONS

National level

59. At the national level, Cyprus, Czech Republic and Liechtenstein have acceded to the Convention since COP 3. Some Balkan and other countries from Central and Eastern Europe may accede before COP 4. The secretariat visited those countries in order to sensitize decision makers to the UNCCD. Affected country Parties of the Northern Mediterranean and other European countries are in the process of elaborating their national action programmes. Italy adopted its national action programme in February, in Rome, and established a national clearing house. Spain presented the main guidelines of its national action programme in June 2000 in Murcia. Portugal is in the process of starting the implementation phase of its national action programme. Greece and Turkey are currently progressing on the approved draft outline of their national action programmes. Malta created a national desertification Web site. Romania continued preparation of its national action programme. The Republic of Moldova adopted its national action programme in January and is now in the process of starting its implementation. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, with financial assistance from the secretariat, have initiated the elaboration of their NAPs. The latter countries and the Republic of Moldova are also receiving financial assistance for strengthening the capacity of their national focal points.

60. Countries of the group of Annex IV, as well as Malta, were invited to send their national reports for COP 4 to the UNCCD secretariat following its guidelines for national reporting. In addition to national reports, the group of Annex IV countries also submitted its regional report. A workshop on national reporting was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in February 2000 with financial support from the secretariat; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Republic of Moldova participated. These countries and Romania also sent their national reports to the secretariat for COP 4.

Regional level of the regional group of Annex IV

61. At the regional level of the regional group of Annex IV, a meeting of focal points followed by the third ministerial meeting were held at Recife, Brazil, in parallel to COP 3. The meeting had two major outcomes. First, the draft terms of reference for the regional action programme were adopted with priority being given to the following areas:

(a) The areas most sensitive in terms of desertification hazard;

(b) The common regional benchmarks and indicators for process and mitigation;

(c) The collection, analysis and exchange of technical and scientific data;

(d) The exchange of data and information;

(e) The involvement of civil society within the regional action programme process;

(f) The traditional practices and knowledge safeguarding the quality of the Mediterranean landscape.

Secondly, a decision was taken to promote the organization of a regional NGO meeting of the Annex IV country Parties in 2000.

62. The fourth ministerial meeting was held in Rome, Italy, in February 2000. The members of the regional group of Annex IV agreed to submit jointly to the

UNCCD secretariat their comments on decisions 6/COP.3 and 8/COP.3. During the meeting a decision was also reached with respect to the provision of funds that would support the work of the UNCCD Northern Mediterranean unit. Monaco was accepted as the second observer of Annex IV, after France. The principle of having representation from NGOs as observers was also endorsed. A technical meeting organized by the Italian Government was held in February 2000 in Rome; it reviewed a current European methodology to further develop the participation of civil society in the implementation of the UNCCD.

63. Three meetings took place in Murcia, Spain, in June 2000 related to the Group of Annex IV: a meeting of the focal points; the fifth ministerial meeting; and a joint meeting of focal points and NGOs of Annex IV countries.

64. The focal points recommended that (a) national focal points should be mandated to work together as a regional coordination committee to prepare the Regional Action Programme; and (b) thematic programme networks should be set up.

65. Further to decision 7/COP.3 on the implementation of an additional regional implementation annex to the Convention for Central and Eastern Europe, consultations continued on the draft additional annex. The Bureau of the Conference at its meeting held at Bonn, on 23 March 2000, took note of the ongoing process of accession to the Convention by Central and Eastern European countries, and decided that the draft additional annex, as submitted at COP 3 by Armenia, constituted a proposed amendment to the Convention and that no further notification to Parties was required for its consideration and possible adoption at COP 4.

66. A workshop on drought mitigation organized by the Government of Hungary and international and scientific organizations in Budapest, in April 2000, was also supported. Furthermore, the UNCCD secretariat, in collaboration with the European Commission and the Hanns-Seidel Foundation, organized in May 2000, in Brussels, a workshop on land degradation/desertification in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of the UNCCD, to review policies and measures on land degradation and promote the accession of concerned countries to the UNCCD.

VI. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION AT THE INTERREGIONAL LEVEL

67. The Government of Mali, with support from the secretariat, organized the second African-Latin American and Caribbean Forum, held in March 2000 in Timbuktu and Bamako, Mali. Concrete offers on an exchange of experiences, such as training and workshops, were made by more than 10 countries so as to enhance South-South cooperation and to implement the interregional platform adopted during the first forum held in Recife in 1998. In order to support this initiative, Venezuela announced a contribution of US$1 million to fund activities over a period of three years.

68. The preparation of an interregional action programme to combat desertification in countries of Central Asia, the Transcaucasus and Eastern Europe had to be postponed because some Eastern European countries have yet to ratify the Convention. This particular initiative was steered and requested by the Tashkent Interregional Conference, held in 1997. It is hoped that, as soon as countries of Eastern Europe have acceded to the Convention, the initiative will be revitalized.

69. A workshop between northern Mediterranean and northern African countries was organized by the Italian Presidency of Annex IV in Rome, in February 2000, on the synergy between the UNCCD, CBD, UNFCCC and the Forest Principle. It took place with the participation of the focal points of both Annex IV and Northern African countries as well as observers. Among other conclusions, it was recommended that National Action Programmes should take into account possible synergy with the other Rio conventions, notably through pilot projects at field

level. Participants expressed a general wish to foster exchanges on this important topic between both sides of the Mediterranean.

70. A training course on techniques for mitigating desertification in the Mediterranean was held in March 2000 in Medenine, Tunisia, organized by the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) of Zaragoza, Spain and the Institut des Régions Arides of Medenine. The secretariat assisted in providing support to the organization of the meeting. Participants included Algeria, Egypt Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey.

71. In addition, the Conference on the Future of the Mediterranean Rural Environment: Prospects for Sustainable Land Use and Management was organized in Menemen, Turkey, in May 2000, by Cranfield University and the Turkish Government with the technical assistance of UNCCD and other international and scientific organizations.

72. Before each session of the Conference of the Parties, the secretariat endeavours to facilitate a pre-Conference NGO preparatory workshop, which is held the weekend before the Conference. The workshop assists NGOs with the coordination of their input to the Conference before its opening and facilitates their organization of a coordinated, collective strategy. In addition, the workshop provides a forum for NGOs to prepare for the two half-day NGO-Government open dialogue sessions, which are organized by NGOs and scheduled within the official programme of work of the COP (see decision 27/COP.1).

73. Thus support was provided to the Brazilian NGO Fundacao Grupo Esquel Brazil, to enable it to host and prepare for the pre-Conference NGO preparatory workshop, held on 13 and 14 November 1999. During the preparatory meeting the NGOs presented their regional reports and thereafter prepared their collective statements and contributions to the Conference.

74. The two half-day NGO-Government open dialogue sessions, held during the official programme of work of COP 3 on the afternoons of the 18 and 24 November 1999, provided a mechanism for the Conference of the Parties to further integrate the participation of civil society in the UNCCD process. The following themes were highlighted at each half-day session: participation and funding of NGOs in the NAP process and enhancement of the role of women. The NGO representatives presented documents, case studies and technical papers on the two subjects, and issued a women's declaration stressing the importance of the equitable participation of women in the NAP process. Thereafter, an open dialogue took place between all the participants. The NGO-Government open dialogue sessions highlighted the importance of the broad participation of all sectors of society, particularly NGOs in both the planning and implementation of the Convention, and in the review and reporting process of national action programmes. In addition, the need to maintain an enabling environment to strengthen and support the activities of NGOs was acknowledged. Participants suggested exploring ways to further increase the participation of NGOs in the sessions of the Conference of the Parties and in the implementation process of the Convention. Furthermore, the Conference of the Parties at its third session adopted decision 18/COP.3 on this subject.

75. In conformity with decision 18/COP 2, the secretariat facilitated the participation of non-governmental representatives in numerous subregional and regional intergovernmental meetings. In particular, the Latin American and Caribbean regional meeting held at Lima in August 1999. Representatives from eight NGOs in the region were assisted to attend. NGO representatives were also assisted to attend the second African-Latin American and Caribbean Forum held at Bamako, Mali, in March 2000.

76. Finally, an interregional meeting of the Mediterranean NGOs was held in Murcia, Spain, in mid-June 2000 to review the participation of NGOs in the

national implementation of the Convention in the annexes involving Mediterranean countries and to encourage the exchange of positive participation experiences between NGOs in the Mediterranean Basin.

77. The meeting resulted in the following output: a draft proposal for an NGO regional project to combat desertification entitled "Participatory water management in Mediterranean arid areas"; the adoption of recommendations specifically addressed to Mediterranean country Governments; and a manifesto calling for 17 June to be also celebrated as the Mediterranean Day to Combat Desertification, coinciding with the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.

78. Finally, civil society interest and involvement in the implementation of the Convention has increased significantly since the second session of the Conference of the Parties. To date, over 570 non-governmental organizations have been accredited with the COP. However, the limited financial resources available to assist NGOs and support them in their contribution remains a major limiting factor to their full participation.

Annex

MAJOR NATIONAL, SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL MEETINGS, HELD OR PLANNED, WITH SECRETARIAT INVOLVEMENT

September 1999 - December 2000

Africa

1999	Place	Title
20-23 September	Algiers	Forum to adopt the subregional action programme in the Maghreb region
27 September-1 October	Nairobi	Third Regional African Conference (preparatory session for COP 3)
19-20 October	Banjul	Meeting of thematic focal points of the subregional action programme for western Africa
21-22 October	Banjul	Meeting of the thematic group on management of shared water resources (subregional action programme for western Africa)
2000	Place	Title
7-9 February	Cotonou	Technical consultation of selected national focal points to review the implementation of national action programmes in Africa
7-11 February	Ouagadougou	Meeting of the thematic group on communication, information and training (subregional action programme for western Africa)
13-15 March	Djibouti	Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) subregional training seminar on the environment information system on the Internet (EISI), (organized by IGAD, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Observatory of the Sahara and the Sahel (OSS))
23-24 March	Bonn	Consultative meeting on the thematic programme network for integrated management of international river, lake and hydrogeological basins in the context of the regional action programme in Africa
10-12 April	Djibouti	National Forum to validate the National Environmental Action Plan/National Action Programme to combat desertification

20-22 April	N'Djamena	National Forum to validate the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification
25-26 April	Bonn	Consultative meeting on thematic programme network for promotion of agroforestry and soil conservation in the context of the regional action programme in Africa
27-28 April	Bonn	Consultative meeting on thematic programme network for promotion of rational use of rangelands and fodder crops development in the context of the regional action programme in Africa
17-21 June	Brazzaville	National awareness raising days
26-28 June	N'Djamena	Subregional meeting on the implementation of the Convention in the central African subregion
30 June	Ouagadougou	Launching of the implementation of the national action programme
9-12 July	Nouakchott	National Forum to launch the elaboration of the national action programme
6-8 September	Niamey	National forum to validate the national action programme to combat desertification

Planned	Place	Title
September	Nairobi	Forum to validate the subregional action programme in Eastern Africa (IGAD - Subregional action programme - Forum)
September	Maroua	National Awareness Seminar
September	Bujumbura	National Awareness Seminar
3-5 October	Nairobi	Subregional workshop for IGAD and SADC member countries on procedures to access existing financial mechanisms (organized by the Global Mechanism in coordination with the UNCCD secretariat)
22-24 October	Algiers	Fourth Africa Regional Conference (preparatory session for COP 4)
October	Lomé	National Forum to validate the national action programme

October	Algiers	Launching workshop for the thematic programme network for integrated management of international river, lake and hydrogeological basins (regional action programme)
October	Conakry	Workshop on synergies between UNCCD, CBD and UNFCCC (subregional action programme for Western Africa)

Asia

1999	Place	Title
21-23 September	Vientiane	National Workshop on the UNCCD implementation
27 September	Jakarta	National awareness seminar on combating desertification in Indonesia
1 October	Sri Lanka	National awareness seminar
24-27 October	Cairo	Global Mechanism consultation on the subregional action programme in West Asia

2000	Place	Title
14-18 February	Delhi	Conference on sustainable agriculture
18-20 February	Delhi	Consultation preparation TNP2
23-24 February	Almaty	Workshop on national reporting for Central Asia
29 Feb.-1 March	Beirut	Workshop on national reporting for Western Asian focal points
14-17 March	New Delhi	Thematic Network No. 2 on agroforestry for Asia
16 March	New Delhi	Workshop on national reporting for Asia except for Central Asia and Western Asia that were covered by above-mentioned events
27-29 March	Kuwait	Conference on Conservation of Biodiversity in the Arid Regions
8-9 May	Brussels	Workshop on land degradation in countries of Central Eastern Europe
28-30 June	Tokyo	Thematic Network No. 1 - Experts consultation on desertification monitoring and assessment for Asia
18-21 July	Bishkek	Experts meeting on the preparation of the subregional action programme to combat desertification in the Aral Sea Basin

Planned	Place	Title
30-31 November	Bangkok	Meeting of selected focal points for Asia
November	Teheran	Launching of Thematic Network No. 3 on Rangeland Management for Asia

Latin America and Caribbean

1999	Place	Title
9-12 August	Lima	Fifth regional meeting
2000	Place	Title
31 Jan.-1 Feb.	Mexico City	Regional meeting for consultants and coordinator of national reports
30-31 March	Kingston	National awareness seminar
15-17 June	Caracas	National awareness seminar
Planned	Place	Title
July (postponed)	Bogota	National awareness seminar
10 July (postponed)	Baracoa	Workshop on Soil Salinization
21-24 August	San Salvador	Sixth regional meeting

Northern Mediterranean and other European countries

1999	Place	Title
13-14 September	Rome	Expert meeting workshop of the group of Annex IV countries
6 October	Republic of Moldova	National Forum for the national action programme
18 November	Recife	Focal points meeting of the group of Annex IV countries
22 November	Recife	Third ministerial meeting of the group of Annex IV countries
2000	Place	Title
16 February	Rome	Technical workshop on the "Social participation to combat desertification: the use of the European Awareness Scenario Workshop Methodology (EASW) in the framework of Annex IV"
17 February	Rome	Adoption of the Italian National Action Programme
17 February	Rome	Fourth Ministerial meeting of the group of Annex IV countries

12-15 April	Budapest	Central and Eastern European workshop on drought mitigation
8-9 May	Brussels	Workshop on land degradation/ desertification in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of the UNCCD
15 June	Murcia	Focal points meeting of the group of Annex IV countries
16 June	Murcia	Fifth ministerial meeting of the group of Annex IV countries
17 June	Murcia	Presentation of the guidelines of the Spanish National Action Programme
18 June	Murcia	Meeting of the NGOs and focal points of the group of Annex IV on the regional action programme

Planned	Place	Title
20 September	Brussels	Focal Points meeting of the group of Annex IV countries
December	Bonn	Focal points meeting of the group of Annex IV countries
December	Bonn	Sixth ministerial meeting of the group of Annex IV countries

Interregional and other activities

1999	Place	Title
21-23 September	Yverdon	High level consultation, Club du Sahel
9-11 October	Alghero	European Union workshop on Data and Information Requirements for Inter-disciplinary Research
14-15 November	Recife	Pre-conference meeting of NGOs preparing for COP 3

2000	Place	Title
18 February	Rome	Workshop of Northern Mediterranean and Northern African countries on potential synergies between UNCCD, CBD, UNFCCC and The Forest Principle
3-7 March	Medenine	Training course on "techniques for mitigating desertification in the Mediterranean"
4-8 March	Timbuktu/ Bamako	Second Africa-Latin America and the Caribbean Forum on combating desertification

10-11 April	The Hague	Workshop of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on Global Environment Conventions
8-11 May	Menemen	Conference on the future of the Mediterranean rural environment: prospects for sustainable land use and management
16-18 June	Murcia	Meeting of the Mediterranean NGOs
Planned	Place	Title
27-29 September	Copenhagen	Meeting on desertification - June information system for the Mediterranean (DISMED)

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